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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 September 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Possible Developments in Iraq

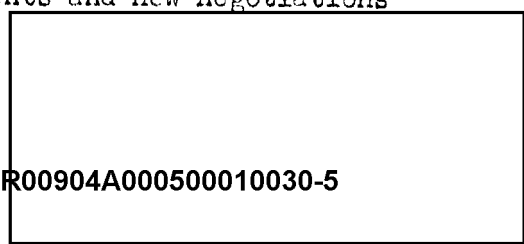
1. The situation in Iraq has grown even more unstable and uncertain since our last estimate (SNIE 36.2/2-59, "The Short-Term Outlook for Iraq," dated 30 June 1959). Qassim has made a number of moves to limit Communist activities. At the same time, these measures have been overshadowed by his public approval of pro-Communist Col. Mahdawi's anti-nationalist activities in the People's Court, the recent execution of Brigadier Tabaqchali and other participants in the Mosul uprising, (as well as four civilian members of Nuri's last government), and by his continued acceptance of the Soviet Bloc build-up in Iraq.

2. Meanwhile, throughout the period the Soviet Bloc has continued and even expanded its activities in Iraq. Increasing numbers of Bloc personnel are working in Iraq, some of whom are high-level specialists advising Iraqi ministries. The Bloc is rapidly implementing its military and economic agreements and new negotiations

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have taken place notably in the fields of atomic energy and civil aviation. In general, we believe the Soviet Bloc is likely to continue its support to Qassim. However, the Iraqi regime has also attempted to place its relations with the West on a more normal basis.*

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For our assessment of basic factors affecting Soviet policy toward Iraq and its connection with Soviet objectives in Iran, see annex.

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3. Predictions as to future developments must remain highly tentative. Despite Qassim's success in maintaining his position, he has not yet developed a political organization personally loyal to him. He probably hopes to maintain an equilibrium between Communist and the various non-Communist forces. He may be able to do so, possibly by counterbalancing the Tabaqchali execution with new moves to cut down Communist power. For example, the trials of persons involved in the Kirkuk disturbances would provide such an opportunity. However, we believe that there is a better than even chance that the struggle for control of Iraq is about to enter another critical phase. The execution of Tabqchali could serve as a catalyst for action in the tense situation. Such a crisis would not necessarily prove decisive, but it would probably involve more extensive disturbances and reprisals than have yet taken place.

4. Reports of coup plots, including the assassination of Qassim, have increased in recent weeks, but no organization with such capabilities is known to exist. Iraqi nationalists' disillusionment with Qassim is at a new peak and the UAR apparently once again fears increasingly that Qassim cannot be relied upon to keep Iraq out of Communist hands. Nasser has claimed that any new coup move would fail, but Nasser may now feel compelled to attempt to create a favorable climate for a coup.

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5. Qassim and the Communists are both almost certainly aware that the nationalists may resort to desperate measures. Either or both may move to forestall a nationalist challenge, though we believe that the Communists would still hope to act in conjunction with Qassim. We believe that Army support is essential, either to maintain the Qassim regime in power or to overthrow it. However, there is little firm information available upon which to judge the balance of sentiment among army leaders toward Qassi, the nationalists, the UAR, or even the Communists. There is considerable reason to believe, however, that troop commanders in the Baghdad area are loyal to Qassim and that many identified anti-regime nationalist and pro-UAR officers have been purged or placed in positions of relative unimportance. Thus, if the nationalists, either alone or with UAR help, do attempt a coup at this time, we believe that its chances of success would be less than even. In the event of a coup attempt, and especially if Qassim were assassinated, serious civil strife is likely.

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6. Although action the Communists in the Kirkuk trials would hearted the anti-communist forces, we believe that present trends indicate the likelihood of a further weakening of nationalist ranks in Irax. The probable result of this weakening would be acute and more overt hostility between Iraq and the UAR and consequently increased turmoil in the Arab World and the Middle East generally. In such circumstances, both the West and the Communist bloc would be likely to find themselves under pressure to play a more active role in the situation.

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ANNEX

Paras. 45 and 47 of NIE 30-59, "Main Currents in the Arab World,"
25 August 1959.

45. We believe that the Soviets attach considerable importance to the stakes involved in Iraq. However, Soviet tactics in seeking to build and consolidate Communist power there will depend on their assessment of the risks and opportunities involved. They probably prefer that the Iraqi Communists acquire the substance of power behind a facade of Arab nationalism. Under present circumstances, at least, they will probably avoid attempting an overt and complete Communist takeover because of the risks of failure and foreign intervention and the probable costs to Bloc relations with Nasser and the nationalist movements. Their most likely tactic is to foster some form of popular front. Nevertheless, they would probably not remain content to share power indefinitely. If in time they came to believe that the Iraqi Communists could take over and retain power, the Soviets would be likely to support them in doing so, particularly if the situation in Iran seemed to be developing in a manner favorable to Soviet interests.

47. In the broadest sense we believe that the emergence of radicalism in Iraq has demonstrated the essential conflicts between

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Soviet policies and those of the reformist brand of Arab nationalism. In the long-run, Bloc interests will almost certainly lie with the more extreme proponents of social and economic change. Even allowing for maximum flexibility in Bloc tactics toward individual governments, it is likely to become increasingly difficult for the Soviets to maintain the substance and even the form of convincing support for both reformism and radicalism, particularly if the latter continues to grow as a significant force in Arab affairs.

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